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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, May 10, 2007

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Article published May 10, 2007

Mother accused of putting baby in bag faces psychiatric exam

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

His name is Kyle. He began his life April 23 by being born at home, tucked in a trash bag and placed in a garage on Westland's northwest side.

He has a 3-year-old sister, Kyra, and grandparents who love him enough to care for him while his mother faces charges of trying to kill him.

Kyle is too young to ask the obvious question: Why? Why would his 27-year-old mother, Valeeka Noelle Gartrell, be accused of such a heinous crime?

In court Thursday, defense attorney Barry Resnick began trying to get answers by saying he wants Gartrell to receive a psychiatric evaluation.

After reviewing the case, Resnick said, "I did have some concerns about her mental condition."

Dressed in green jail clothing, a tearful Gartrell faced visiting Westland District Judge Gail McKnight, who delayed a preliminary hearing until May 31 to allow for a psychiatric evaluation.

Gartrell, accused of delivering her own baby, could face penalties ranging up to life in prison if she's convicted of attempted murder and first-degree child abuse.

McKnight also granted Resnick's request to reduce Gartrell's bond from \$100,000 cash to \$50,000 10 percent, meaning the family could secure her release for \$5,000.

Gartrell plans to stay with a Westland cousin, Tonya Brown, who came to court Thursday.

Brown has a 6-year-old daughter of her own, but she said the girl would stay upstairs with a grandmother and would not be in direct contact with Gartrell.

Brown also told McKnight that she is on disability and doesn't work outside the home. She promised that Gartrell would be supervised around the clock.

Even so, McKnight ordered Gartrell to be placed on an electronic tether, and she told her not to have contact with any child under 18 years old. The judge also warned Gartrell to avoid weapons, alcohol and illegal drugs.

Resnick told McKnight that Gartrell is taking an undisclosed prescription medication.

Gartrell was charged amid accusations she gave birth to her own baby, put it in a trash bag and placed it in the garage of her parents' home near Joy and Hix roads.

Police believe that Gartrell gave birth around 11 a.m. April 23 and then woke her mother to tell her that she was bleeding.

Gartrell's parents took her to St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia, where doctors told them that Gartrell already had given birth, police Sgt. Chris Benson said.

Relatives returned to the home and found the baby after hearing cries coming from the garage, said Benson, who praised doctors and the relatives for saving the baby's life.

Gartrell has no criminal history. In court Thursday, Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Michael Woodyard didn't fight Resnick's request for a lower bond, leaving a decision to McKnight.

Woodyard simply told McKnight that prosecutors were concerned for Gartrell and any children that she may encounter --

concerns that McKnight tried to address in her court orders.

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Mecosta Co. woman accused of child abuse

Updated: May 10, 2007 04:45 AM EDT

MECOSTA CO. - A Mecosta County woman is behind bars Thursday morning accused of child abuse.

The sheriff's department says Tricia Lee, 22, was arrested Wednesday morning, suspected of abusing her 9-month-old daughter.

They say its the result of an investigation that's been going on since March.

No word this morning on any official charges.



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Boyfriend faces trial on child abuse charge

By John Michalak
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

HAZEL PARK -- A 33-year-old Hazel Park man waived his preliminary examination Tuesday on a first-degree child abuse charge involving the 10-month-old infant of his girlfriend.

Michael Stephen Snyder remains jailed in lieu of a \$1 million cash bond pending his arraignment May 17, before Oakland County Circuit Judge Michael D. Warren Jr.

The boy was treated at William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, for multiple injuries including fresh and old bruising over much of his body, police said.

Oakland County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Sara Pope Starnes said since Snyder was charged, the boy's mother, 23, formerly of Hazel Park, also was charged civilly with child neglect for allegedly failing to protect her son. That case will be heard in Wayne County where the mother now lives, Starnes said.

The infant's injuries, Starnes said, appear to have been caused by shaking and impact of hitting his head against something.

She said the injuries didn't stem from normal actions of a toddler walking and falling.

Snyder had been released from prison in October after serving eight years for attempted murder in connection with a drive-by shooting in Wayne County, police said.

The mother, who isn't being identified because her last name is the same as the victim's, started seeing Snyder about six months ago and living with him three of the months in Hazel Park.

The mother and Snyder took the infant to Beaumont Hospital on April 20 where the mother explained the injuries from falls and crawling, police said. A Beaumont nurse contacted the Oakland County Protective Services.

Officials told police the boy had fresh and old bruising all over his body including marks on his neck from what appeared to be fingers. Tests showed the boy had bleeding on the brain, police said.

Snyder acknowledged to police he became "frustrated" with the boy on April 20 because he was "fussy, crying and not sleeping," police said.

Snyder's first-degree child abuse charge is punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Contact John Michalak at john.michalak@dailytribune.com or (248) 591-2521.

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ClickOnDetroit.com

Police Say Mother Lied About Kidnapping

Mother In Custody, Will Be Charged

POSTED: 11:28 am EDT May 9, 2007

UPDATED: 5:44 am EDT May 10, 2007

DETROIT -- Detroit police said a 2-year-old boy who was reported missing on Tuesday was found safe on Wednesday.

Michigan State Police issued an Amber Alert after the mother of 2-year-old Troy Squalls said he was abducted by two men driving a gold-colored minivan.

The mother told police the child was taken from her during an assault that occurred at 9:30 p.m. Tuesday. She said she was walking on Wadsworth Street between Rosemont and Penrod avenues when two men snatched the child and demanded \$10,000 for his return.

Police told Local 4 that the mother lied about the kidnapping and questioned her at the Western District station.

Authorities said the mother is in police custody and will be charged on Thursday with filing a false police report.

Police said the mother was involved in a conspiracy to extort \$10,000 of ransom money, although it's not clear from whom. Two other individuals, a man and a woman, are expected to meet with investigators, police said, and they will face charges as well.

Police said they are not sure at this time what will happen with the child, but Child Protective Services is expected to come to the station to investigate.

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Article published May 10, 2007

2 trials are planned for day-care owner



Clark

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By **BENJAMIN ALEXANDER-BLOCH**
BLADE STAFF WRITER

ADRIAN - An Adrian man accused of molesting children at the day-care center he operated out of his home will face all but one of the 77 felony sex charges filed against him in a jury trial scheduled for August.

Douglas Jay Clark, 52, has pleaded not guilty to all the charges - which include 65 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct - stemming from the Adrian police department's investigation into alleged abuse at Guardian Family Daycare.

During a pretrial hearing yesterday in Lenawee County Circuit Court, the defense and prosecution agreed that Mr. Clark's delivery and manufacture of marijuana charge should be tried separately because the charge did not directly relate to the child-abuse charges.

The other charges Mr. Clark will face are five counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct, three counts of child sexually abusive activity, and one count each of extortion, felony firearms, and computer use to commit a crime.

While Assistant Prosecutor Laura J. Schaedler had thought the defense yesterday might ask for Mr. Clark to undergo a psychiatric evaluation to gauge his criminal responsibility, Mr. Clark's attorney, John Glaser, did not ask for the evaluation.

Adrian police Detective Sgt. Lynn Courington said he believes the evaluation would have been pointless "because, while obviously something is seriously wrong with him to have done something like this, I am certain he can tell the difference between what is right and wrong."

Adrian police were called by a parent of a possible victim March 9. Police subsequently searched Mr. Clark's home and seized videos, photos, and a computer.

The abuse occurred from 2001 to the present, and the victims, both male and female, are all under the age of 16, and most under 13, Sergeant Courington said. The day-care's license, which was issued in 2002, was suspended March 13 by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Mr. Clark remains in the county jail in lieu of \$8.3 million bond.

Oakland County news briefs

The Detroit Free Press

May 10, 2007

COMMERCE TOWNSHIP: Man accused of sex abuse may lose parental rights

Proceedings have begun to terminate the parental rights of a 48-year-old Commerce Township man accused of sexually abusing his 14-year-old daughter.

The man was charged in 52-1 District Court in Novi on Tuesday with four counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

His attorney in the parental-rights case, Daniel Bagdade, said a hearing was held in juvenile court Monday to end the man's rights to the teen and her 17-year-old sister.

Bagdade said he wants to hold off on a juvenile court hearing until the criminal case has been tried. He said his client, who still is in the Oakland County Jail on a \$4-million bond, is distraught.

"He's worried about his daughter and how she's doing and her emotional state," Bagdade said. "It's just very hard for him."

The man is a teacher at Oxford Middle and High schools. School officials indicated he will be fired when they get official notice from the court about the charges.



Deal offered to suspect in abuse case

Thursday, May 10, 2007

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

WYOMING -- He was described as the nice handyman with the pool that all the kids loved.

Now Roy Wyntjes, 53, is accused of sexually abusing at least six neighborhood girls 10 and younger. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison.

Wyntjes, a self-employed subcontractor, gave the mother of one of the alleged victims a friendly wink as he shuffled into Wyoming District Court Wednesday.

The woman, who later declined to comment, wiped away tears as Wyntjes and his lawyer waived his probable cause hearing, moving the case against him to Kent County Circuit Court.

The mothers and the alleged victims were waiting at court in case Assistant Prosecutor Ed Lis needed them to testify. The girls asked Lis why he didn't talk to them during the hearing.

Lis explained that the hearing was waived, but he might need them to testify in trial.

However, the prosecution is negotiating with Wyntjes and his lawyer in hopes of avoiding what could be a traumatic trial for the alleged victims.

The plea offer would allow Wyntjes to plead guilty to one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and three counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct involving four girls. The state would drop other charges of first- and second-degree CSC and would not bring charges on two cases that police say they have discovered since Wyntjes was arrested last month.

Lis said he was willing to entertain the plea offer.

Investigators say Wyntjes was well known in the Godwin Heights neighborhood, where he has owned a home since 1974 and invited kids to enjoy his pool in the 100 block of Celia Street SE.

Wyntjes' attorney, James Dimitriou II, asked District Judge Pablo Cortes to lower his client's \$100,000 bond, noting the man is a lifelong Wyoming resident with no criminal record and has adult children living in the area.

Lis said, if anything, Wyntjes' bond should be increased.

Cortes kept the bond as is and said if Wyntjes bonded out, he would be required to wear a GPS tether.

Send e-mail to the author: bdeiters@grpress.com

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Cassopolis Vigilant

**ONLINE EDITION**[Print Page](#)

Foster and adoptive parents fill huge need

Thursday, May 10, 2007 9:58 AM EDT

Thursday, May 10, 2007

In an ideal world, every child would have a mother and father that loved them and provided for their every need. Unfortunately, it isn't a perfect world.

In Michigan alone there are more than 4,000 children waiting for a family, or for their adoption to be finalized.

When parental rights are terminated, it is the loving and giving people who open their homes through foster care, who provide a place during transition.

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has declared May as Foster Care Month in Michigan to highlight the vital role that foster families play in caring for the state's 18,500 foster children.

Foster Care Month provides an opportunity to make Michigan residents more aware of the need for caring, dedicated foster parents and the needs of children in foster care. Children usually enter foster care because of neglect or abuse in their homes. Foster care families provide safe, stable and supportive homes for these children and youths until they can be returned to their parents or are adopted into permanent homes.

Finding enough homes to meet the needs here in Michigan for foster families is critical.

Though the goal is for children to remain, or be returned to their parents, safety concerns often mean separation is necessary. When children must be removed, those in the Department of Human Services (DHS) are interested in the child's welfare work toward keeping children with siblings and relatives and in their communities.

Babies are the easier to love, but older children and minorities are often the hardest to place.

Forty of these children are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for a "forever family."

This exhibit will be touring Michigan and free copies are available of a promotional DVD, featuring photographs from the exhibit, video of children who are waiting to be adopted and information about the adoption process for families who are ready to begin the process.

The photographs in The Heart Gallery were taken by more than 40 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. The kids thoroughly enjoyed their photo shoot experience. Some children were able to help select which portrait to feature in The Heart Gallery, while others came up with their own poses and some were given lessons in photography during the photo shoot, allowing them to become budding photographers themselves.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit The Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org



Mentor for offenders — including Nathaniel Abraham — goes to jail

Drinking costs parolee his freedom

May 9, 2007

BY BEN SCHMITT and DESIREE COOPER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

A Detroit man whose job is to help ex-offenders get their lives on course and had mentored Nathaniel Abraham since the 21-year-old's release is now behind bars himself.

John Cromer, who has a felony record, is jailed on two parole violations for drinking in a bar with Abraham, officials said Tuesday.

Cromer, 41, was spotted drinking with Abraham on April 15 at a downtown Detroit bar, said Russ Marlan, a state Corrections Department spokesman.

He was arrested Friday during a scheduled meeting with his parole officer in Detroit.

Abraham was just 11 in 1997 when he was charged as an adult with first-degree murder in the shooting death of Ronnie Greene Jr. outside a Pontiac grocery store. Convicted of second-degree murder in 1999, he was sentenced as a juvenile.

He was released from state custody when he turned 21 in January, then briefly lived in Bay City before moving to metro Detroit. Abraham is not on parole and has no state restrictions.

Cromer, who works for America Works of Detroit, has served as a mentor and spokesman for Abraham, frequently driving him to and from work. He and Abraham were connected through Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit where they both attend.

America Works is a national program that provides employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

Cromer took Abraham shopping for new clothes and helped him get a driver's license and land a clerical job with a Wayne County building company. The pair also met with Bill Cosby during a March appearance by the comedian at Mott Community College in Flint.

Cromer, who has several retail fraud convictions, contacted the Free Press this week from Wayne County's William Dickerson Facility in Hamtramck. He denied that he was drinking but admitted to escorting Abraham to Envy nightclub on April 14 during the Hip-Hop Summit in order to introduce Abraham to rap celebrities.

"They didn't bother me when I was working with other ex-offenders, but they are getting upset about me with Nathaniel," Cromer said. "I was trying to help Nathaniel. He wants to be in the hip-hop industry."

Marlan said the parole violations stem from April 15, not April 14, when someone spotted Cromer drinking with Abraham inside Club Evolution on Broadway.

As a parolee, Cromer is barred from drinking alcohol or associating with anyone he knows to have a felony record, Marlan said.

"There is some leeway a parole officer can grant, given Mr. Cromer's employment," Marlan said. "I don't think him associating with someone is as much an issue as compared to being in a bar with someone he knows to be a convicted felon."

Cromer tested positive for marijuana during a parole office visit in January, Marlan said. He was given outpatient treatment instead of going back to prison.

In the current case, the state recommends that Cromer attend a 30-day diversion program in the Ingham County Jail instead of returning to prison, Marlan said. The program focuses on drug and alcohol counseling.

Peter Cove, founder of America Works in New York, said he is outraged by Cromer's arrest.

"He is one of the most remarkable employees I've ever seen," Cove said Monday. "He has always worked with ex-offenders. Everybody knows that. This guy was helping people get jobs and stay out of prison."

Abraham and his mother could not be reached for comment.

Abraham's attorney Daniel Bagdade said he met with his client Monday after learning of Cromer's arrest.

"He's concerned about his reputation and his name, and he just doesn't want anybody to think he had anything to do with this, because he didn't," Bagdade said. "Nate has worked hard to keep his name clean since he has gotten out."

He said Abraham has made new arrangements for transportation to and from work.

Contact **BEN SCHMITT** at 313-223-4296 or bcschmitt@freepress.com.

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Rural police chief facing charge

Thursday, May 10, 2007

ERIN ALBERTY

THE SAGINAW NEWS

An embattled Saginaw County police chief who is facing a charge of stalking has an ally in a public employer who calls the allegation "no different than getting a speeding ticket."

"He's innocent until proven guilty," Oakley Village President Douglas Shindorf said of Larry Briggs, chief of the Oakley-Brady and Perry police departments. "I'm 100 percent satisfied with his performance and certain that this will be beaten in court."

Owosso investigators say a 19-year-old Owosso woman complained of unwelcome phone calls from Briggs in April 2006 after she sought police assistance in a custody dispute in Perry. Records from Briggs' personal cell phone showed he called the woman 37 times between April 12 and April 19, police said.

Shiawassee District Judge Terrence P. Dignan on Wednesday arraigned Briggs, 37, on a misdemeanor charge of stalking.

Briggs posted \$200 bond before his arraignment. He will undergo a pre-trial exam at 8:30 a.m. Monday before Chief District Judge Ward L. Clarkson.

The Saginaw News could not reach Briggs for comment.

Oakley Village Councilman Francis Koski, who also is on the four-member Oakley-Brady police committee overseeing the department, agreed no action is appropriate until the Briggs' case is over.

"That's putting the cart in front of the horse," he said. "What if we find out this guy is innocent in two or three weeks? We've jumped the gun."

"Anybody can make an accusation."

Controversy has surrounded Briggs during his two-year leadership of the joint Oakley-Brady Police Department. Brady Township Supervisor Ronald L. Gasper, who has butted heads with Briggs throughout the past year, declined to comment on whether he thought the township should take action on Briggs' status as chief.

"We haven't decided anything," he said.

Gasper last month accused Briggs of drawing media attention to a state probe into allegations that Gasper illegally burned a barn on his property. Gasper said Briggs leaked the news in retaliation for his call last summer for Briggs' resignation because of a "lack of accountability."

Last spring, former Township Clerk Melissa Alcorn accused Briggs and now-recalled Township Supervisor John C. Schoch of tampering with her mail -- a claim Saginaw County sheriff's deputies could not substantiate.

Shortly thereafter, federal agents raided Alcorn's home in a case involving her husband, who has served jail time and probation for second-degree child abuse. Agents confiscated several firearms but made no arrests. Under federal law, felons can't own firearms. v

Erin Alberty is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9673.

Non-Married Couple Adoption Bill Moves

MIRS, May 9, 2007

Legislation legalizing adoption by non-married couples moved out of a House panel today on a split vote. The bill, however, will likely be played up in the news media as a measure to legalize adoption by same-sex couples.

Opponents of the legislation see it as an attempted end-run around the state's ban on recognizing same-sex marriages, which was passed overwhelmingly by the voters in 2004. In fact, fear that constituents will see the bill in that light may be the biggest obstacle the measure faces.

On an 8-5-2 party-line vote, with Rep. David **LAW** (R-Commerce Twp.) and Rep. Marc **CORRIVEAU** (D-Northville) abstaining, the House Judiciary Committee reported out **HB 4259**.

MIRS did some checking to see if the legislation would be doomed to oblivion — at least in the Senate — but at this point opposition to it is difficult to gauge. Significantly, the Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC), which helped spearhead the 2004 anti-gay marriage amendment, is neutral and declined to comment on **HB 4259**. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is also neutral on the bill.

The best bet on the bill's future appears to be that most Republicans will oppose it and enough Democrats, possibly even House Speaker Andy **DILLON** (D-Redford Twp.), could oppose it in the House to prevent it from passing there. On the other hand, with MCC staying on the sideline, it may have some legs.

If it gets to the Senate, the GOP majority will probably sink it and may even prevent it from being brought up. However, once again it's hard to weigh the effects of MCC's lack of opposition.

The position (or lack thereof) by the MCC would tend to add standing to the argument made by Committee Chair Paul **CONDINO** (D-Southfield) today that the issue goes beyond the same-sex marriage and adoption debate.

"I became involved with this after doing pro-bono work for hospice patients, who, for one reason or another, hadn't gotten married," said Condino, who is also the sponsor of the bill. "They wanted to have their child adopted [by the surviving partner] and I had to tell them they couldn't do it because they weren't married. And in this case we're talking about a heterosexual couple."

"While it's true that a gay or lesbian couple could apply to adopt (under the legislation), this is not all that's involved here," Condino continued. "Some have advised that we should present our arguments on this in terms of the financial benefits. But to me, it's a moral issue."

Condino also pointed out that the legislation would not change the current status, which is that all adoptions would still be subject to court approval.

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Coalition for Adoption Rights and Equality (CARE) and the Michigan Women's Coalition support the legislation. Evangelical and Protestant groups oppose it.

With MCC officially sitting out the debate, it's difficult to determine whether the legislation has legs in the Legislature. Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** is on record supporting adoption by gay couples, so if it were to reach her desk it would likely be signed into law.

A Pew Research Center for the People & the Press a year ago showed evidence that opposition to

gay adoption is falling but is still above 50 percent. According to the survey of 1,405 adults taken in March 2006, 46 percent of Americans supported gay adoption, up from the 38 percent support for allowing gay adoption the same survey reported in 1999.

Another aspect of the poll to be considered was that although it showed 51 percent of Americans were opposed to legalizing gay marriage, after the poll was released anti-gay-marriage ballot proposals continued to show solid support in individual state polls and elections. One explanation for this may actually be found in another part of the survey, which showed that, although opposition to gay marriage had fallen to 51 percent nationally, only 29 percent of those surveyed said they "favored" gay marriage.

The survey also revealed evidence that opposition on "gay rights" issues may tend to increase when the issues are subject to heightened news media attention. According to the survey, opposition to these gay rights positions spiked following the Massachusetts Supreme Court decision to recognize gay marriage and remained high throughout the 2004 election season. It then began to decline after the spotlight was taken off the topic.

Tim **SCHMIG** of the Michigan Association of Christian Schools (MACS) spoke out against the legislation in committee, claiming it would be "chipping away" at traditional values."

Schmig also argued that allowing gay adoption could compromise the ability of religious groups to provide adoption services.

"If you make a change like this to public policy, religious groups will be put in a position where they could lose their tax-exempt status if they don't comply," Schmig said.

"But the [Michigan] Catholic Conference (MCC) does not oppose this," Condino replied.

When the legislation was introduced on Feb. 12, the MCC seemed to be positioning itself to oppose it.

"Public policy regarding adoption must be crafted within marriage and the traditional family structure," MCC Spokesman Dave **MALUCHNIK** said at that time. But today Maluchnik verified Condino's statement that the MCC is taking no position on the bill.

A year-old story from New Bedford, Mass. may provide some background on both Schmig's comments and on MCC's neutrality.

In March 2006, local New Bedford Catholic Charities leaders announced that they'd made a "legal accommodation for a greater social good" by facilitating 13 adoptions of children in foster care to same-sex couples.

The Catholic Charities leaders in New Bedford contended that if they did not comply with Massachusetts' non-discrimination policy, they would no longer be able to fulfill a state contract that has allowed them to place hundreds of other foster care children in stable homes.

Meanwhile, in committee today, Rep. Rick **JONES** (R-Grand Ledge) brought up a situation he thought would toss the argument for the bill in the hamper.

"I had a constituent, a woman, who talked to me. She said she had had a relationship with another woman who had children and she ended up adopting her children," Jones said. "Then the relationship broke up and the judge basically took her rights in regard to the children away. How does that help give the children stability?"

Condino responded that the story Jones told supported the bill.

"Currently, we have judges that overrule each other about these adoption issues," Condino said.
"This would make the situation clearer and prevent that sort of thing from happening."

"I disagree," Jones retorted.



Medicaid cuts could put more burden on employers

Thursday, May 10, 2007

By Mark Sanchez

msanchez@mbusinessreview.com

The planned six percent cut in Medicaid payments to health care providers will put a greater financial burden on employers to make up the difference, lobbyists say.

The nearly \$50 million the state would save through the payment cuts, targeted to begin June 1, could induce further shifting of costs onto private payers by hospitals, doctors and other care providers.

Estimates now peg the effects of cost shifting on employers at 25 cents on every dollar spent on health premiums in Michigan -- and many in the health care industry believe that's a conservative estimate.

"We, as a business community, are getting the short end of the stick. We're the ones who are picking up the tab," Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce lobbyist Jared Rodriguez said during an Alliance for Health forum last week.

"We have a direct, vested interest in seeing more money in Medicaid, not less," Rodriguez said.

Citing the state's \$700 million budget hole for the current fiscal year, Gov. Jennifer Granholm on April 30 issued an executive order cutting Medicaid payments by six percent across the board, from June to September.

Care providers say the cuts will only deepen their losses on providing care to Medicaid recipients, resulting in more cost shifting.

"All of us as a society get to pay a little more for their care," said Mark Lemoine, system director of government affairs at Grand Rapids-based Spectrum Health.

Spectrum Health, with a Medicaid patient population of 14.7 percent, will see a \$2.3 million reduction in payments for care provided at the Blodgett and Butterworth campuses, Helen DeVos Children's Hospital and its Continuing Care unit.

Spectrum incurred \$45 million in Medicaid losses in the last fiscal year -- an amount that's based on cost and has grown steadily from \$24.5 million five years earlier.

The cuts represent a \$1.2 million hit for inpatient care at Metro Health Hospital in Grand Rapids.

In Kalamazoo, Borgess Health reports a potential \$1.4 million hit if the payment reduction goes through. The health system has a Medicaid patient population of about 11 percent.

Bronson Healthcare Group would lose another \$2 million in Medicaid reimbursements.

The financial ramifications for hospitals could go even further. Should the number of physicians who are no longer accepting Medicaid patients increase, as it has been, hospitals worry it would result in increased visits by recipients to emergency rooms, by far the highest cost of care available.

By not funding Medicaid properly, Lemoine said, "we're creating our own problem."

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Article published May 9, 2007

LOCAL: Child loses in court's same-sex benefits decision

With a two-year old son battling a form of autism and requiring constant supervision, Howell's Erin Otteman relies on her partner to bring home not only income, but health care benefits. But if a state Court of Appeals' February decision is not reversed, Otteman; her partner, Rachel Rangel, and at least hundreds of other gay couples throughout the state could be impacted in the wallet.

The decision reversed a lower court's opinion and said public employers cannot recognize same-sex unions for any purpose, including for health benefits. Otteman, 26, and Rangel, 24, would be in a bind because the latter works as a custodian at the University of Michigan and Otteman's son, who came from a past relationship, goes to the doctor's several times a week.

"It's hard to think about it, it really is," said Otteman, who is also trying to pursue a college degree. "It's unfathomable for me to have to go to work full-time to get benefits."

Still, there are some critics to offering benefits to same-sex couples.

For more on this story, see Thursday's Daily Press & Argus.



Letter carriers to collect food on Saturday

Hometown Headlines

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, May 10, 2007

By Dan Fearson

Journal Staff Writer

The National Association of Letter Carriers' Food Drive will celebrate its 15th year of food collection on Saturday.

The food drive is the largest one-day drive in the nation, and more than 240,000 letter carriers will collect food in all 50 states.

People wishing to participate in the drive are asked to leave food donations by their mailbox on Saturday morning and carriers will collect the product during or after regular mail delivery for the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan.

This year's drive is sponsored by the National Association of Letter Carriers-Local 256, the Greater Flint AFL-CIO, the United Way of Genesee County, American Postal Workers-Flint Area, Mailhandlers Local 307 and the Rural Letter Carriers Association.

- Dan Fearson

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Wisconsin welfare reform marks 10 years

MILWAUKEE A Wisconsin program that requires mothers to work or get job training in exchange for a check and child care is turning ten, but it's not without its critics.

The Wisconsin Works, or W-Two, replaced a conventional welfare program, which had been around since the 1930s.

Republican presidential candidate and former Governor Tommy Thompson helped start the program in 1997 after nearly a decade of experimentation. He counts the program among his proudest accomplishments because it helped lay the groundwork for the 1996 federal reform of welfare.

Proponents of the program point to the way it has reduced the welfare rolls. Detractors point to a 2005 state audit that found that only about 20 percent of participants earned more than the poverty level in the year after they left.

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